John Galt (1779-1839)

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John Galt	
Born	2 May 1779 Irvine, North Ayrshire, Scotland
Died	11 April 1839 (aged 59) Greenock ,Scotland
Occupation	Writer, colonial businessman
Nationality	Scottish
Period	1812 - 1839
Genres	poetry, drama, short stories, travel writing
Notable work(s)	*Annals of the Parish*, *The Chronicle of Dalmailing*
Spouse(s)	Elizabeth Tilloch

John Galt (2 May 1779 – 11 April 1839) was a Scottish </wiki/Scotland> novelist </wiki/Novel>, entrepreneur, and political and social commenter. Because he was the first novelist to deal with issues of the industrial revolution, he has been called the first political novelist in the English language.[1]

Life

Born in Irvine, North Ayrshire Scotland, Galt was the son of a naval [2] When his family relocated to Malden in 1789, Galt became an apprentice and junior clerk, writing essays and stories for local journals in his spare time. He moved to London in 1804 to seek his fortune and in 1809 began studying law at Lincoln's Inn .[3]

While subsequently traveling in Europe Galt met and befriended Lord Byron . On his return to London, Galt wrote an account of his travels, which met with moderate success. Decades later, he would also publish the first full biography of Lord Byron. He also published the first biography of the painter Benjamin West *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West* (1816, expanded 1820).[3]

In 1813, Galt attempted to establish a Gibraltarian trading company, in order to circumvent Napoleon 's embargo on British trade; however, Wellington's victory in Spain made this no longer necessary. Galt then returned to London and married Elizabeth Tilloch, daughter of Alexander Tilloch.[4] In 1815, he became Secretary of the Royal Caledonian Asylum in London. He also privately consulted in several business ventures.[2]

Concentrating on his writing for the next several years, Galt lived at times in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere, writing fiction and a number of school texts under the pseudonym Reverend T. Clark. In addition to moving his residence frequently during this period, Galt also switched publishers several times, moving from *Blackwood's Magazine* to Oliver and Boyd and then back again.[2]

In 1824, Galt was appointed Secretary to the Canada Company a charter company established to

aid in the colonization of the Huron Tract in Upper Canada While in Canada Galt lived in Ontario where he founded the city of Guelph in 1827.[2] The community of Galt in Ontario was named after him. His three sons played prominent roles in Canadian politics one of them, Alexander , was one of the 'Fathers of the Confederation and Canada's first Minister of Finance.[2]

During his tenure with the Canada Company, Galt ran afoul of several colonial authorities, including Sir Peregrine Maitland,who was Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada at the time.[2] He was heavily criticised by his employers for his lack of basic accounting skills and failure to carry out their established policies. This resulted in his dismissal and recall to Great Britain in 1829.[2]

Soon after his return to England he was imprisoned for several months for failure to pay his debts.[2] One of Galt's last novels, *The Member*, has political corruption as its central theme.[2]

Despite failing health, Galt was involved in another colonial business venture, the British American Land Company,which was formed to develop lands in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada . Galt served as secretary but was forced to resign in December 1832 because of his health.[5][6]

He retired to Greenock in Scotland , publishing his two volume *Autobiography* in 1833.[7]

John Galt is commemorated in Makars' Court, outside The Writers' Museum, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh and by the John Galt memorial fountain in Greenock. In 2006, the community of Guelph proclaimed the first Monday in August, "John Galt Day."[8][9][10]

The city of Galt, Ontario </wiki/Galt,_Ontario> was named after John Galt, but has now been absorbed into Cambridge, Ontario </wiki/Cambridge,_Ontario> in 1973.

Works

Galt's novels are best known for their depiction of Scottish rural life, tinged with ironic humour. Galt is best remembered for his depictions of rural and village life in eighteenth-century Scotland. In his most successful books, including *Annals of the Parish; or, The Chronicle of Dalmailing* (1821), he endeavored to construct a day-to-day account of one person's experiences, recording the details of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century life and the vernacular speech of Scotland. Galt is thus seen as an early realist author particularly concerned with contemporary social issues. Discursively plotted, Galt's fiction principally focuses on character, featuring highly individual protagonists ranging from uncompromising merchant adventurers to sympathetic country ministers. Galt treats these figures with varying degrees of irony by unmasking their self-deception and moral failings to his readers. In many of his works, Galt additionally confronts the theme of society in transition from simple village life to a modernized commercial and urban existence. Though a number of his lesser writings are generally forgotten, Galt continues to be admired for his insightful observations, historical verisimilitude, skillful blending of irony and pathos, and linguistic mastery of Scottish dialect.

Major Works

Galt wrote a number of short stories, travel essays, dramas, and miscellaneous works, but most of his major writings were novels, which he imaginatively classified as "theoretical histories." *Annals of the Parish* recounts the lives of parishioners in northern Scotland through the journal narration of a rural pastor, Reverend Micah Balwhidder. In entries dating between 1760 and 1810, Balwhidder writes a kind of social history by describing the growth of the village of Dalmailing in the early phases of the industrial revolution. He details subjects ranging from comic local church events to issues of significant historical upheaval, including the effects of the American Revolution and Napoleonic victories in Europe. Galt's epistolary novel *The Ayrshire Legatees; or, The Pringle Family* (1821) follows the country minister Dr. Zachariah Pringle, his wife, son, and daughter to London and records their views of life in the English metropolis in their letters to friends back home. The somewhat haphazard and episodic first-person narrative of *The Steam-boat* (1822) contains the tales of numerous steamboat travelers in Scotland and England, particularly those of Thomas Duffle, a Glasgow merchant. *Sir Andrew Wylie, of That Ilk* (1822) tracks its eponymous hero, an aspiring young businessman, from Scotland to London. He finds wealth, a seat in Parliament, and, after securing a baronetcy, wins the hand of his beloved Mary Cunningham, daughter of the Laird of Craiglands.

Galt's first truly political novel, *The Provost* (1822) describes the life of the sly, self-centered minister James Pawkie and relates events in the fictional Scottish village of Gudetown.

The Entail; or, The Lairds of the Grippy (1823) chronicles the obsessive struggle of a destitute Glasgow orphan, Claud Walkinshaw, to regain the lost inheritance of his landed ancestors.

A partial response to the novel *Old Mortality* by Sir Walter Scott, *Ringan Gilhaize; or, The Convenanters* (1823) is set amongst the religious conflicts in Scotland during the Reformation.

Galt also produced several more historical novels—ostensibly in the manner of Scott—which concern Scottish and English royalty: *Rothelan* (1824), *The Spaewife* (1824), and *Southennan* (1830), works that focus on the reigns of Edward III, James I, and Mary, Queen of Scots, respectively. *The Last of the Lairds; or, The Life and Opinions of Malachi Mailings, Esq. of Auldbiggings* (1826) relates the downfall of Mailings, the final remnant of a crumbling Scottish feudal dynasty, while *Bogle Corbet; or, The Emigrants* (1831) offers an imaginative fictionalization of Galt's own experiences in Canada. Like Galt himself, the novel's hero leads a group of Scottish settlers to Canada, founds a city there, and adjusts to life in the North American wilderness.

Narrated by the Scotsman Archibald Jobbry, *The Member: An Autobiography* (1832) dramatizes Galt's interests in British parliamentary politics and is a critique of political corruption focused on its Tory protagonist. In the sequel to this work, *The Radical* (1832), Galt presents his views in favor of political progress and voices his support of the 1832 Reform Act.

Among Galt's nonfictional works, the *Life and Administration of Cardinal Wolsey* (1812) relates the exploits of the ambitious sixteenth-century Lord Chancellor of England, whom Galt depicts as a rigorous champion of unrestricted individual achievement. In *Cursory Reflections on Political and Commercial Topics* (1812), Galt documents his essentially realist and progressive ideas on politics and economy.

WORK LIST

Galt wrote the following works:[7]

- *Cursory Reflections on Political and Commercial Topics* (1812)
- *The Life and Administration of Cardinal Wolsey </wiki/Cardinal_Wolsey>* (1812)
- *The Tragedies of Maddelen </w/index.php?title=Maddelen&action=edit&redlink=1>, Agamemnon </wiki/Agamemnon>, Lady Macbeth </wiki/Lady_Macbeth>, Antonia </wiki/Antonia>* and *Clytemnestra </wiki/Clytemnestra>* (1812)
- *Voyages and Travels* (1812)
- *Letters from the Levant* (1813)
- *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West </wiki/Benjamin_West>* (1816)
- *The Majolo (2 volumes)* (1816)
- *The Appeal* (1818)
- *The Wandering Jew </wiki/Wandering_Jew>* (1820)
- *The Earthquake (3 volumes)* (1820)
- *Glenfell </w/index.php?title=Glenfell&action=edit&redlink=1>* (1820)
- *The Life, Studies and Works of Benjamin West </wiki/Benjamin_West>* (1820)
- *Annals of the Parish* (1821)
- *The Ayrshire </wiki/Ayrshire> Legatees* (1821)
- *Sir Andrew Wylie (3 volumes)* (1822)
- *The Provost* (1822)
- *The Steam-Boat* (1822)
- *The Entail (3 volumes)* (1823)
- *The Gathering of the West* (1823)
- *Ringan Gilhaize (3 volumes)* (1823)
- *The Spaewife </wiki/Spaewife> (3 volumes)* (1823)

- *The Bachelor's Wife* (1824)
- *Rothelan (3 volumes)* (1824)
- *The Omen* (1825)
- *The Last of the Lairds </wiki/Laird>* (1826)
- *Lawrie Todd </w/index.php?title=Lawrie_Todd&action=edit&redlink=1>* (1830)
- *The Life of Lord Byron </w/index.php?title=The_Life_of_Lord_Byron&action=edit&redlink=1>* (1830)
- *Southennan </w/index.php?title=Southennan&action=edit&redlink=1> (3 volumes)* (1830)
- *Bogle Corbet or The Emigrants (3 volumes)* (1831)
- *The Lives of the Players* (1831)
- *The Member* (1832)
- *The Radical* (1832)
- *Stanley Buxton </w/index.php?title=Stanley_Buxton&action=edit&redlink=1> (3 volumes)* (1832)
- *Autobiography (2 volumes)* (1833)
- *Eben Erskine </w/index.php?title=Eben_Erskine&action=edit&redlink=1> or The Traveller (3 volumes)* (1833)
- *The Ouranoulagos </w/index.php?title=Ouranoulagos&action=edit&redlink=1> or The Celestial Volume* (1833)
- *Poems* (1833)
- *The Stolen Child* (1833)
- *Stories of the Study (3 volumes)* (1833)
- *Literary Life and Miscellanies (3 volumes)* (1834)
- *A Contribution to the Greenock Calamity Fund* (1834)
- *Efforts by an Invalid* (1835)
- *The Demon of Destiny and Other Poems* (1839)

CRITICAL RECEPTION:

Critical Reception

During his lifetime, Galt's works elicited a largely positive and sustained critical interest. Such figures as Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge admired his writing and ensured his popularity until his death. From this time, however, Galt's reputation has declined considerably. In the ensuing years, his “theoretical histories” continue to be remembered for their realistic and detailed evocation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish life and for their humorous and sympathetic portrayal of character. Galt has been criticized, nevertheless, for creating chaotic plots and oversimplified supporting figures in his later works. Despite flaws in craftsmanship, plotting, and a degree of topicality, critics acknowledge that a number of Galt's novels, including *Annals of the Parish, The Provost,* and *The Member,* demonstrate an enduring merit. Additionally, some contemporary critics focus on Galt's literary influences, particularly that of David Hume and Adam Ferguson of the Scottish Enlightenment. These commentators describe Galt as a thoroughgoing realist whose collected writings reflect his generally optimistic belief in social, industrial, and commercial progress and his critique of traditional feudal systems as declining and corrupt relics of the past.

Notes

^ "BBC Writing Scotland, Reformers and Radicals: A Man's a Man" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/arts/writingscotland/learning_journeys/reformers_and_radicals/> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/arts/writingscotland/learning_journeys/reformers_and_radicals/>. Retrieved 2010-09-27.

^ *a b c d e f g h i* "Dictionary of Canadian Biography entry for John Galt" <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3400> <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3400>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ *a b* "Article detailing John Galt's literary works" <http://www.nndb.com/people/599/000104287/> <http://www.nndb.com/people/599/000104287/>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ </wiki/File:Wikisource-logo.svg> </wiki/File:Wikisource-logo.svg>"Tilloch, Alexander <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Tilloch,_Alexander_(DNB00)>". *Dictionary of National Biography </wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography>*, 1885–1900. London </wiki/London>: Smith, Elder & Co </wiki/Smith,_Elder_%26_Co.>.

^ "Canadian encyclopedia article on British American Land Company" <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0000993> <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0000993>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ "Quebec historical article on John Galt" <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/encyclopedia/JohnGaltd.1839.htm> <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/encyclopedia/JohnGaltd.1839.htm>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ *a* *b* "E-notes literary criticism of John Galt" <http://www.enotes.com/nineteenth-century-criticism/galt-john> <http://www.enotes.com/nineteenth-century-criticism/galt-john>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ August Holiday <http://www.craigmarlatt.com/canada/symbols_facts&lists/august_holiday.html>

^ "Guelph Mercury article about John Galt Day" <http://news.guelphmercury.com/News/article/362665> <http://news.guelphmercury.com/News/article/362665>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

^ "Guelph Downtown feature about John Galt day" <http://www.guelphdowntown.com/events.php?e=89> <http://www.guelphdowntown.com/events.php?e=89>. Retrieved 2008-09-29.

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- Lee, Robert C. (2004). *The Canada Company And The Huron Tract, 1826-1853*. Natural Heritage Books, Toronto </w/index.php?title=Natural_Heritage_Books,_Toronto&action=edit&redlink=1>. ISBN </wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number> 1-896219-94-2 </wiki/Special:BookSources/1-896219-94-2>.

External links

Wikiquote </wiki/Wikiquote> has a collection of quotations related to: ***John Galt <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Galt>***

- Biography at the Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3400>
- Works by John Galt <http://www.gutenberg.org/author/John_Galt_(1779-1839)> at Project Gutenberg
- The University of Guelph Library provides page images and full text for many of Galt's works. The collection is available at <http://www2.lib.uoguelph.ca/resources/ebooks/galt_list/>
- Wellington Guelph Community Portal <http://www.wellingtonguelph.ca/>